The United States Merchant Shipping Offensive During the Second World War

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The day before the German invasion of Poland a large group of dignitaries, including Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, were assembled at the Newport News Shipbuilding Yard to celebrate the launching of Maritime Commission hull number one. Although other ships had already been built under this program, the liner SS *America* was meant to symbolize the rebirth of the American merchant marine. Her keel had been laid almost a year previously *as* the new flagship for the United States Lines. She was 723 feet in length and displaced over 35,000 tons. Her two sets of steam turbines could propel the ship at a service speed of twenty knots, although she hit over twenty-four during her initial trials. Accommodations were provided for 1,202 passengers with a crew of 643. She was fitted with two kingposts fore and aft, and her two large angled stacks, adorned with the colours of the United States Line – red, white, and blue – were easily visible to the 30,000 spectators who attended her launching on 31 August 1939.[1] By the time she was ready to carry passengers the following year, the Battle of the Atlantic precluded her operating on the New York to Southampton run, and instead she cruised to the West Indies, transporting American tourists, and military personnel to new bases acquired in exchange for fifty obsolete destroyers given to the British. In the spring of 1941, the Navy requisitioned the ship and designated her USS *West Point* (AP-23). In September, she was formally commissioned into the Navy and along with a host of other merchant ships; they provided the backbone to the American sealift effort during the Second World War, the most destructive conflict in the annals of history.2

The war signalled the United States' emergence as a global superpower. American forces participated in every theatre of the war and, equally important, American supplies were funnelled to all the major Allies under the auspices of Lend-Lease, demonstrating the Jominian

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[1] L. A. Sawyer and W. H. Mitchell, *From America to United States: History of the Long-Range Merchant Shipbuilding Programme of the United States Maritime Commission,* Volume I (Kendal, 1979), 23-24. Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States,* Volume I, 23-24; and Felix Riesenberg Jr., *Sea War: The Story of the U.S. Merchant Marine in World War II* (New York, 1956), 51-52.

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trinity of strategy, grand strategy, and logistics.' From ports throughout the world, American and Allied merchant ships delivered the materiel, munitions, supplies, and fuel needed to keep the Soviet Union, the British Commonwealth, the Free French, Chinese, and American armies in the war. However, as in the First World War, at the conflict's outset the Allies were ill prepared to face the daunting sealift challenge that emerged. In the previous war, they had merely to focus on carrying forces and supplies to Western Europe. The Second World War required a far more extensive transportation network, and although the U.S. Maritime Commission and the British Ministry of Shipping had been established and a merchant ship construction program begun, the means to control these civilian ships, along with the military's sealift ships, were still inadequate for the task at hand. This work will focus on the United States' involvement in sealift and how the military and the merchant marine resolved the many issues and differences that arose.

Unlike the British or Commonwealth Merchant Navies, which have John Slader's *The Fourth Service* (1997) and Tony Lane's *The Merchant Seaman's War* (1990), a true scholarly study of the American merchant marine's role in the Second World War has yet to be written. The majority of the works, such as Clay Blair's two-volume *Hitler's U-Boat War* (1996 and 1998), Kevin Smith's *Conflict Over Convoys (1996),* Michael Gannon's *Operation Drumbeat (1990)* and *Black May (1998),* Terry Hughes and John Costello's *The Battle of the Atlantic* (1977), and Catherine B. A. Behrens', *Merchant Shipping and Demands of War* (1955), focus predominately on submarine warfare in the Atlantic. Others examine the war from a personal viewpoint, like Sherod Cooper's *Liberty Ship: The Voyages of the John W. Brown* (1997) and A. A. Hoehling's *The Fighting Liberty Ships* (1990), or a more technical aspect, such as L. A. Sawyer and W. H. Mitchell's four-volume *From America to United States* (1979-1986). The only noteworthy attempts at documenting the history of the American merchant marine in the war are John Bunker's *Heroes in Dungarees* (1995) and *Liberty Ships (1972),* Robert Carse's *The Long Haul (1965),* and Felix Riesenberg's *Sea War* (1956). Each makes an important contribution, but all fall victim to a common tendency to recount sea yarns instead of providing comprehensive, coherent history. This oversight, along with a prevalent 'naval centric' approach in most histories of the Second World War, has had a detrimental effect on the perception of the merchant marine's role, and their neglect in most works. Three key points have not been examined in detail. First, the construction of the fleet of ships to maintain the trans-oceanic pipeline between the Allies is a topic that is more involved than simply the construction of *Liberty* ships. Second, the delivering of cargo, and the obstacles that the merchant marine faced, are complex and intertwined with the last point; the use of the merchant marine in military campaigns.

Any study of the Second World War must look at the effects of the previous conflict and the attempts to rectify the errors learned during the inter-war years. On 7 July 1920, the US Navy disbanded the two organizations that had handled the shipment of supplies and

'Robert W. Coakley and Richard M. Leighton, *Globdl Logistics and Strategy, 1940-1943* (Washington, 1955), 3-5.

soldiers across the Atlantic during the First World War — the Naval Ocean Transportation Service (NOTS) and the Cruiser and Transport Service (CTS) — and combined their functions into the Naval Transportation Service. The NTS returned to the Army its fleet of transports that the Navy had taken over during the war, and retained only twenty-four ships.[4] The appreciation for sealift proved short-lived and once again the lessons learned during the previous conflict was largely ignored. In 1925, the Secretary of the Navy commented in his annual report:

> The Naval Transportation Service is filling a very important and necessary part in the naval organization. These vessels are not only a necessary adjunct of the fleet and shore establishment, but they pay their own way. A ***skeleton organization*** [italics added] is thus maintained which, in time of national emergency, can be expanded more quickly and efficiently than a whole new organization could be built up. Officers and men are given experience in a little-known branch of naval activity, and such experience will prove invaluable in time of rapid expansion.[5]

This comment, while laudable, did not reflect the actual attitude prevalent in the Navy. When war broke out it was judged better to have larger and more expensive warships around, and to build up the support network and shipping ***ad hoc.*** This decision restricted funding to capital ship construction and other long-term projects dear to officers' hearts. By the eve of the next war, the decline in the NTS fleet left only ten vessels available to support the Navy in the impending two-ocean conflict.[6] Additionally, a weak central administrative office and the lack of field offices to supervise the operation of its ships plagued the NTS. In 1946, Rear Admiral William M. Callaghan, then commander of the NTS and destined to be the first commander of the joint Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) in 1949, gave a talk before the Naval War College on his command during the pre-war years:

> [NTS] consisted primarily of one officer in the Navy Department who administered the organization — and then only in conjunction with other collateral duties having to do with the preparation of the Navy's annual requirements for fuel appropriations. One other officer was assigned the duty of preparing war plans for the Naval Transportation Service, but that officer also had collateral duties and was divorced from immediate contact with the operational functions of the Naval Transportation Service.[7]

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[4] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportation* (Washington, 1954), 55-56.
'Ibid., 57.
James C. Fahey, *The Ships and Aircraft of the United States Fleet.* 1' Edition Reprint, (Annapolis, 1976), 28.
Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportation,* 58.

As opposed to the Navy, the Army attempted to take the lessons of the Great War to heart. In March 1919 it organized a new Army Transportation Service (ATS) – originally created in 1898 – under an independent Army Transportation Corps, but opposition to this move left the service answering to the Quartermaster General. In September 1939, the ATS possessed only ten ships but contained the mechanism to expand through chartering civilian vessels.8 By the time the Japanese launched their attacks against the Allies in the Pacific, the Army had expanded to control a fleet of 127 ships, involved in the movement and sustainment of Army forces deployed overseas.'

While the US Army and Navy struggled through the interwar period over the issue of sealift, a piece of legislation supported by a one-time Assistant Secretary of the Navy proved to be critical to the eventual Allied victory in the Second World War. While constitutional and presidential historians continue to debate the success of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, his commitment to rebuilding a merchant marine is unquestioned. Having witnessed firsthand the transportation problems involved in moving the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) to France in the First World War, and in attempting to revitalize the ailing American shipping industry, Roosevelt endorsed the passage of a new merchant marine act. Sponsored by Senator Royal Samuel Copeland (D-NY) and Representative Schuyler Otis Bland (D-VA), the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 became known as the " Magna Carta of the Merchant Marine".[10] This bill reaffirmed the general policies set forth in the previous acts of 1920 and 1928 and authorized the creation of a new organization which would stimulate the construction and operation of new ships through the payment of subsidies to ship owners to run these vessels on vital trade routes. The bill met with stiff opposition in Congress but was eventually signed into law on 29 June 1936.11

Unlike previous maritime legislation, the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 was specifically designed to provide the needed shipping and manpower to support a future conflict. The preamble set the tone:

> It is necessary for the national defense and development of its foreign and domestic commerce that the United States shall have a merchant marine (a) sufficient to carry its domestic water-borne commerce and a substantial portion of the water-borne export and import foreign commerce of the United States and to provide shipping service on all routes essential for maintaining the flow of such domestic and foreign water-borne commerce at all times, (b)

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[8] Chester Wardlow, *United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services: The Transportation Corps: Responsibilities, Organization, dnd Operations* (Washington, 1951), 138; and David H. Grover, *U.S. Army Ships and Watercraft of World Wdr 1I* (Annapolis, 1987), 2.

Wardlow, *United States Army in World War II, The Technical Services,* 42.

10 Rene de la Pedraja, *A Historical Dictionary of the US. Merchant Mdrine and Shipping 1ndustry: Since the Introduction of Steam* (Westport, 1994), 394-395.

[11] Samuel A. Lawrence, *United States Merchant Shipping Policies and Politics* (Washington, 1966), 31.

capable of serving as a naval and military auxiliary in time of war or national emergency, (c) owned and operated under the United States flag by citizens of the United States insofar as may be practicable, and (d) composed of the best-equipped, safest, and most suitable types of vessels, constructed in the United States and manned with a trained and efficient citizen personnel. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States to foster the development and encourage the maintenance of such a merchant marine.'

Roosevelt, much like President T. Woodrow Wilson, believed in the 'arm of commerce' philosophy. During the First World War, Wilson signed into law the Shipping Act of 1916, along with a Navy and National Defense Act, and it was intended to provide a sizable merchant force to protect American neutrality. Under this piece of legislation, the Congress created the U.S. Shipping Bureau (US SB), the first government agency with the mission to regulate the commercial merchant marine. When the country entered the First World War, to spur ship construction, the Emergency Fleet Corporation (EFC) was created to oversee the construction, conversion, and commandeering of vessels for the war. Following the peace negotiations, the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 aimed to liquidate the USSB/EFC fleet and reestablish the principles of cabotage (the protection of American inter-coastal trade). The Merchant Marine Act of 1928 aimed to halt the decline of the American merchant marine by instituting a policy of subsidies for the carriage of mail, in response to similar actions by the British government for the Cunard Line. This act, however, provoked criticism and a Congressional committee, led by Senator Hugo Black, determined the subsidies to be ill-managed and led to reform and the passage of the Merchant Marine Act of 1936.

President Roosevelt assumed that the economic situation of the country, due to the Great Depression, would not generate large-scale ship construction, even with substantial operational and construction monetary subsidies. Imbedded in the new act was Title VII, Private Charter Operation. Specifically, Section 701 authorized and directed the newly formed U.S. Maritime Commission to commence a long-range building program to provide adequate tonnage for routes specified as essential. Since the commission determined these routes and could alter and increase them at will, the law theoretically allowed it to commence the construction of a commercial fleet that could be easily and readily converted into an auxiliary of the U.S. military. This program, besides providing valuable jobs for a depressed workforce, also mobilized the shipbuilding industry.' Following an extensive review of the merchant marine in 1937, the Maritime Commission awarded contracts to the 'Big Five' shipyards – Newport News, Federal, New York Shipbuilding, Sun, and Bethlehem – allowing them to maintain an infrastructure and labor base, so that, when the Naval Acts of 1940 were passed, they could rapidly switch to warship production, and merchant shipbuilding could be diverted to the other nineteen smaller yards in existence in 1940, or to a host of new yards that

[12] U.S. *Public Law No. 835.* 74th Congress, 2d Session, 1936, Section 101. [13] *Public Law No. 835,* Section 701.

sprang up due to the Maritime Commission shipbuilding program.[14] With the passage of the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, the nation's armed forces finally appeared prepared to face the possibilities of a new world conflict with sufficient merchant ships and mariners, along with a Navy adequately equipped to meet its potential commitments. The war would demonstrate, however, that even with these capabilities, the lack of central organization, the divergence of requirements, and the global commitments of a super-power proved as great a limiting factor to Allied success as Axis actions.

The Maritime Commission, initially headed by Joseph Kennedy who was succeeded by Rear Admiral Emory S. "Jerry" Land USN (Ret.) on 16 April 1937, set out to build a fleet of 500 ships over a ten-year period. The commission determined that the US needed to be represented in some twenty major trade areas. Since commercial firms lacked the funds to replace their old USSB built ships, the Maritime Commission was directed by Roosevelt to aid in the replacement of these vessels, since a government-sponsored shipbuilding program would be more economical than simply providing subsidies to operators. All of the vessels built were to be freighters and tankers intended to convey the nation's commerce across the world's oceans. It is significant to note that neither Roosevelt nor the Maritime Commission provided for any substantial passenger ship construction, despite the lessons of the First World War. *America* was solely a symbolic gesture to replace the aged ex-German liner *Leviathan* that had symbolized the nation's merchant marine in the inter-war years until scrapped in 1938.[15] This failure to anticipate the need to transport large numbers of troops overseas reinforces the perception that Roosevelt intended the U.S. to serve *as* the Arsenal of Democracy for the nations of Western Europe.16

Throughout the war, the US Army and Navy, along with the War Shipping Administration and the British Ministry of War Transport, would find the issue of troop transports controversial. The Navy had earmarked the three largest and fastest passenger ships – SS *America, Manhattan,* and *Washington* – for conversion into auxiliary aircraft carriers. Additionally, the Navy wanted to take over most of the large and fast C-3 freighters, which were ideal for conversion into attack transports, and convert them into flattops. The Army and the WSA strongly opposed this and eventually the decision was made to convert some of the T-3 tankers into the successful *Sangamon-class* of escort carriers, and industrialist turned shipbuilder, Henry J. Kaiser, lobbied Franklin Roosevelt to build the fifty-

[14] United States Maritime Commission, *Economic Survey of The American Merchant Marine* (Washington, 1937), 26-52 and Frederic C. Lane, *Ships for Victory: A History of Shipbuilding Under the US Maritime Commission in World War II,* Historical Reports of War Administration United States Maritime Commission, No. 1 (Baltimore, 1951), 32-39.

[15] John Maxtone-Graham, *The Only Way To Cross* (New York, 1997ed.), 350. There were plans to begin construction of a new class of trans-Pacific passenger liners, known as the P4-4 class. However their design was never formalized and their construction never authorized.

[16] Pedraja, *A Historical Dictionary of the U.S. Merchant Marine and Shipping Industry*, 19-20, and Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States,* Volume I, 23-24.

ship *Casablanca-class* of escort carriers in one year.' To augment the lack of troopships, the United States asked for the loan of several of the large British passenger liners, in particular the RMS *Aquitania* and *Queen Elizabeth,* to reinforce the Matson LinesMatsonia, *Monterey,* and *Lurline,* shuttling forces from the West Coast of the United States to Hawaii and Australia in the dark days following the attack on Pearl Harbor.' The United States was counting on its own super liner, the USS *Lafayette* (AP-53, better known as the French Blue Riband holder, *Normandie),* to provide the bulk of the troop sealift across the Atlantic Ocean. The Navy had seized the ship in December 1941 and began to convert her into the largest troopship in the world. However, on 9 February 1942, a yard worker inadvertently set fire to a large stack of lifejackets and that quickly spread throughout the ship. A comedy of errors – no water pressure, the failure to alert the local fire department, then disregarding the ship's designer, and attempting to drown the fire – led to the ship capsizing in the berth, a constructive total loss.19

With the loss of the *Lafayette,* along with the fear that the remaining large passenger ships in the American merchant marine would be taken over by the Navy, and even with augmentation from the British and other Allied liners, severe time constraints led the Army and the WSA to decide upon constructing and converting of medium-size vessels into troopships. In 1941, the Army proposed a class of fifty vessels to be built along the lines of a commercial design, known as *Seatrains.* These vessels could transport fully loaded railway cars – or military vehicles – on three decks, with two sets of tracks running the length of the vessel. The US Navy, sometimes hesitant to change, feared the structural stability of such a ship should it be damaged, and lobbied that they be built to a conventional break-bulk cargo design. The Army reluctantly agreed. The shortage in troopships led to their conversion, known as the C-4 *General-class.* In early 1942, the Maritime Commission contracted with two shipyards to build twenty of the larger P-2s.[20] However, due to delays in design and the awarding of contracts, the first of these vessels were not completed until 1943, and the majority of them were not in operation until the final year of the war. This lack of troop carrying capacity would have a serious impact on the ability of the Allies to plan operations

17 Robert W. Coakley and Richard M. Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940-1943* (Washington, 1955), 195-212; Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States,* Volume DI (Kendal, 1984), 8-13; Sawyer and Mitchell, *Victory Ships and Tdnkers: The History of the 'Victory' Type Cargo Ships and of the Tankers Built in the United States of Americd During World War II* (Cambridge, 1974), 90-93; Sawyer and Mitchell, *From America to United States,* Volume IV (Kendal, 1986), 56-69; and Lane, *Ships for Victory,* 612-613.

18 Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940-1943,* 143-165.

19 Robert Ballard and Rick Archbold, *Lost Liners* (Toronto, 1997), 176-185; and John Maxtone-Graham, *The Only Way to Cross,* 361-392.

20 lbid., 619-625. A total of 65 C-4s were eventually completed, of which only 12, including the *Marine Eagle,* were built to a cargo configuration. Of the P-2s, 19 were completed for the military while 2 others were built to commercial specifications for American President Lines. Interestingly, in 1966, the Maritime Administration released the C-4s to commercial companies so they could be retrofitted back into cargo ships to meet the sealift demands faced by the United States in Vietnam.

and also would affect the cargo fleet, since many freighters were converted and diverted to carry troops to make up for this shortfall.

Overall, the ships built by the Maritime Commission proved highly successful, not only with commercial industry, but also the military. Instead of constructing ships for individual companies or trade routes, the commission decided to built four distinct classes of vessels. During the First World War, the US Shipping Board and the Emergency Fleet Corporation had allowed each shipyard to construct vessels to their own design. While intended to shorten construction time, this practice actually resulted in delays. The famous Hog Island Shipyard in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with its fifty ways, did not complete the first of its 122 freighters until after the armistice.21

The Maritime Commission ships included three varying sizes of freighters and one group oftankers. The first fifty ships authorized under Section 701 included *America,* twelve T-3 tankers, twenty C-2, and seventeen larger C-3 freighters. A smaller cargo ship, the C-1, followed in the second wave of construction and was intended to replace the aging fleet of smaller coastal and tramp steamers."

T a b l e 1 2 3

Standard Vessels built by the Maritime Commission

Type	Length	Speed (knots)	Deadweight Capacity (tons)	Capacity
C-1 Freighter	417' 9"	14	9,137	452,420 ft3
C-2 Freighter	459' 2½"	15.5	8,751	536,828 ft3
C-3 Freighter	492'	16.5	12,438	732,140 ft3
T-3 Tanker	553'	18	18,300	133,000 bbls

Although intended for the commercial sector, the Army and Navy took possession of thirty-seven of the initial fifty vessels and demonstrated the clear military utility of these ships. The others, which remained with private shipping firms, served mainly as transports during

[21] Edward N. Hurley, *The Bridge to France* (Philadelphia, 1927), Chapters IV-VII.

2 Lane, *Ships for Victory,* 27-32.

23 Gerald J. Fischer, *A Statisticdl Summary of Shipbuilding Under the U.S. Maritime Commission during World War II,* Historical Reports of War Administration United States Maritime Commission No. 2 (Washington, 1949), 24. The characteristics for the C-1 are for the Cl-B, the most common type, built to a full scantling design, meaning the upper cargo deck in the hold was completed enclosed, unlike the shelter deck configuration of the Cl -A type.

the war.[24] On a larger scale, the evidence is clear that the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, while intending to provide relief to the ailing shipbuilding industry and replacing worn-out ships of the commercial industry, served as a means to hasten the rearmament of the United States. All told, the Maritime Commission built 5,777 ships from 1937-1945. Many maritime and naval historians have lauded the fact that this was the greatest shipbuilding feat in history.[25] While true, the ships built were a mixed bag and in some ways proved a hindrance rather than an asset to the development of the commercial industry and the overall war fighting effort of the United States and its allies. Of the ships, 682 were constructed specifically for naval use, from troop transports and tenders, to landing ships and frigates. Many smaller vessels, including coasters, barges, tugs and ore carriers, a total of 727, were included in the grand total. Of the four major types of vessels originally promulgated by the Maritime Commission, only 160 C-1, 229 C-2, 100 C-3, and 35 T-3 tankers were built, and many of these were taken over by the military.[26]

The largest numbers of these vessels were termed "emergency construction" and began with sixty *Ocean-class* freighters built for the British Merchant Shipping Mission in two new American shipyards; both – one at Bath, Maine, and the other in Richmond, California – were owned by the Todd Shipyard Corporation, in association with a newcomer in ship construction, Henry J. Kaiser.[27] Following up on these vessels, and designed for ease of fabrication and speed, the Maritime Commission built 2,708 *Liberty* ships, 414 cargo *Victories,* and 523 T-2 tankers.[28] The Canadians constructed their own versions, known as the *Fort* and *Park* classes, while the British concentrated on larger and faster vessels. The construction of so many *Liberties* actually had a negative affect as it required more ships to produce the same results that could have resulted with fewer standard vessels due to the *Liberty's* slower speed, size, internal configuration, boom capabilities, and limited capability to offload in undeveloped and damaged ports. [27] Instead of being a charter for a revived

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24 War Shipping Administration, *United Stdtes Merchant Mdrine at War,* 78.

George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford, 1994), 200; Morison, *The Battle of the Atlantic, September 1939-May 1943,* 290-296; and Allan Nevins, *Sail On: The Story of the American Merchant Marine* (New York, 1946), 94-95.

Fischer, *A Statistical Summary of Shipbuilding Under the U.S. Maritime Commission during World War II,* 41-42.

Lane, *Ships for Victory,* 42-46. Admiral Land hoped to build these ships and then be done with them. They were coal-powered, with antiquated triple-expansion engines, and only capable of 11 knots. Land commented, " In my judgment we are not interested in the type of ship proposed by the British . . . we should build ships for 20-years life and have an eye on the future . . . we should sell the ships to the British and be entirely clear of this design of vessel which is suitable for their purposes but would not be suitable for ours."

United States Maritime Commission, *A Statistical Summary of Shipbuilding.* Report No. 2 (Washington, 1949), B-3; and War Shipping Administration, *United States Merchant Marine at War,* 15. A total of 509 Liberties were transferred to Allied nations during the war. After the war, the *Liberties* were used predominately to re-equip the merchant ships of the Allies lost or damaged during the war.

Emory S. Land, "Tribute to the Liberties," United States Naval Institute *Proceedings* (December, 1960), 107-108.

commercial industry, the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 served as a precursor for the Two-Ocean Naval Act of 1940 and provided most of the auxiliaries used by the Navy and the cargo ships needed to sustain the Allied war machine in their campaigns.

T a b l e 2 3 0
Emergency Construction and Passenger Vessels of the Maritime Commission

Type	Length	Speed (knots)	Deadweight Capacity (tons)	Capacity
EC-2 *Liberty*	441' 6"	11	10,793	500,245 ft3
VC-2 *Victory*	455' 3"	15 or 17	10,850	453,210 ft3
T-2 Tanker	523' 6"	14.5	16,735	141,000 bbls
C-4 Troopship	522' 10V2"	17.5	6,094	2,500 troops
P-2 Troopship	612' 3"	19	8,154	5,200 troops

The Second World War has been viewed as the epitome of Alfred Thayer Mahan's prophecy of sea power. However, the war was not won on the oceans, or in the air, but on land, as described by Sir Julian Corbett.[31] Naval combatants, for all their success, served a secondary role in protecting and supporting the amphibious assaults and drives across the Pacific and Atlantic. Every major fleet engagement took place over key strategic locations: the Mediterranean, the Atlantic sea-lanes, New Guinea, Midway, the Solomons, the Marianas, and the Philippines. Most of the pre-war Allied naval staffs failed to acknowledge this fact and as a consequence strategic sealift was relegated to a secondary priority before and even during the war, and subsequently in the literature that has followed. The same, of course, had happened a generation earlier, and despite the vaunted battle fleet's inactivity during the First World War, and the centrality of the NOTS and the CTF to the American war effort, professional myopia was just as pronounced.

One of the reasons for this inattention may be due to the rather haphazard way that sealift was initially handled and how many of the military campaigns revolved around this issue. As previously noted, in the United States the ATS proved more organized for the

[3o] Fischer, *Summary of Shipbuilding Under the U.S. Maritime Commission,* 24

[31] Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles ofMaritime Strategy* (London, 1911), 14. "Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided — except in the rarest cases — either by what your army can do against your enemy's territory and national life, or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do."

outbreak of the Second World War than did the NTS. While the Army chartered ships to supplement its fleet, both services competed against commercial interests and other government agencies, particularly after Lend-Lease took effect. These solicitations, however, defied a 1939 agreement where both services agreed to allow the Maritime Commission to handle such negotiations.[32] As all three parties attempted to charter ships, many operators responded by raising their rates and allowing the services to bid against each other. Additionally, the ATS faced a serious manpower shortage, as many of their civilian civil-service crews left them for more profitable work on board the newly built Maritime Commission ships. To alleviate this problem, the Army proposed to transfer its fleet to the Navy, just as it had done in 1917-18. As early as 1935, both services had agreed that the Navy would operate all ships traversing a potential war-zone, much like the NOTS and the CTF.

On 7 May 1941, the Secretaries of War and the Navy signed a memorandum directing the transfer of the ships of the ATS to the NTS for the duration of the emergency.[33] The Army intended to deliver twenty-six vessels to the Navy, along with a host of contract-operated ships under short-term charter. However, both services faced severe personnel restrictions and the Navy placed a higher priority on manning its warships than it did on auxiliary ships for the Army. President Roosevelt hoped to avoid these difficulties with the creation of a Strategic Shipping Board on 23 December 1941, but much like many of his other wartime creations it proved cumbersome and was hamstrung by having too many high officials assigned to it.[34] As a result, the planned transfer collapsed and resulted in the creation of a civilian organization, outside the military chain to control and operate the vast merchant fleet being constructed by the Maritime Commission: the War Shipping Administration (WSA), on 7 February 1942 under Admiral Land, similar to the British Ministry of Transport, formed on 1 May 1941.[35] Unlike the Emergency Fleet Corporation of the U.S. Shipping Bureau in the First World War, the WSA was charged with the control of

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' Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportation,* 66-67.

[33] Ibid., 64 The memorandum stated, "That the increasing burden being imposed upon the Army Transport Service, and the inability of the service [Army] to accomplish satisfactorily, with union-controlled civilian crews the tasks now assigned and to be assigned, makes it desirable for the Army to surrender operation of its transport service for the term of the present emergency. Immediate transfer of this service to the Navy . . . will enable the Navy to be prepared to meet more promptly the Navy task . . . for the overseas movement of Army forces against naval opposition."

34 The members of the Strategic Shipping Board included Admiral Land, Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, Chief of Naval Operations Harold Stark, and the president's personal advisor Mr. Harry L. Hopkins.

35 War Shipping Administration, *The United States Merchant Marine at War,* Report of the War Shipping Administration to the President, (Washington, 1946), 73-77; and Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportation,* 62-65; and Robert W. Love, Jr., *History of the U.S. Navy,* Volume Two, 1942-1991 (Harrisburg, 1992), 66-67. In his analysis of the Navy in the Second World War, Robert Love blames CNO Harold Stark for allowing the Army to assume this mission, a common misconception. Love and others have failed to appreciate the larger picture facing merchant shipping and sealift.

all U.S.-flagged shipping except combatant, auxiliary, and transport vessels of the armed services. This step relieved the services of the responsibility for operating and managing merchant ships, but it also took these vital assets out of their direct control. The WSA detailed U.S. steamship companies as agents for the operation of Maritime Commission-built vessels and those requisitioned from the commercial industry. This alleviated the administrative burden and utilized the expertise inherent in the seafaring business community.

What the armed forces did not initially comprehend was that the WSA operated as an executive agency and therefore had great operational latitude.' Admiral Land was appointed to head both the WSA and the Maritime Commission concurrently, with Lewis W. Douglas – his assistant – acting as the point man in dealings with the military, until replaced by Granville Conway in February 1944.[37] To coordinate merchant shipping, the Combined Shipping Adjustment Board was fashioned under the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 26 January 1942 between the United States and United Kingdom.'

The basis for the WSA was given new justification when the Navy attempted to utilize the NTS to coordinate the use of merchant shipping, but its limitations became readily apparent in a little known operation, codenamed *Bobcat*. While this mission paled in comparison to a D-Day style landing, it aptly demonstrated how unprepared the Navy was for its sealift mission. On 30 December 1941, with a pressing need to provide a secure supply line between the west coast of the United States and Allied forces in Australia, outgoing Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold R. Stark recommended the establishment of a fueling base at Bora-Bora in the South Pacific, along the intended convoy route. Elements of an Army National Guard regiment and the 1st Naval Construction Battalion were assigned to construct a 270,000-barrel fueling depot. While the Army assembled the troops, the Navy scurried for six ships to transport them and their supplies. Only three vessels could be found commercially, however, and the Navy had to request an additional three from the Maritime Commission. As a consequence of this scramble, a delay in the arrival of cargo at the ports of embarkation, and a failure on the part of the NTS to coordinate the undertaking properly, Convoy BC-100 did not sail until 27 January 1942, thirty-two days after the plan's conception. When the ships arrived at their Pacific paradise, the troubles they experienced in the States reappeared. Deep within the holds of the vessels, vital material needed to offload the ships had been loaded first, making that now inaccessible to the crews. In the words of one historian, it was a "classic Catch-22, the ships could not be offloaded without floating equipment and the floating equipment could not be assembled without unloading."[39] The cargo was finally cleared from the six ships, but the fifty-two days it took was an ominous

[36] War Shipping Administration, *Merchant Marine at War,* 12-32.

37 Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1943-1945,* 57-89.

[38] Bureau ofNaval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportdtion,* 69; and War Shipping Administration, *United States Merchant Marine at War,* 41.

[39] Charles R. Schrader, "Rapid Deployment in 1942," *United States Army Logistics, 1775-1992* (Washington, 1992), 707-718.

sign for what lay ahead for sealift in the Second World War.40

Operation *Bobcat* is only one example of the problems that emerged during the war. By 1944, the U.S. Merchant Marine was delivering fifty million long tons of cargo overseas yearly: to the United Kingdom and continental Europe fifteen million, thirteen million to the Pacific, eight million to the Mediterranean region, six million to South America and the Caribbean, five million to the Soviet Union, and three million to India.' Additionally, the difficulties in delivering cargoes to some of these far-flung reaches must be taken into account. Throughout the war, the volume of shipping overwhelmed the capabilities of many ports, particularly in Britain. It must be remembered, instead of a constant flow of ships steaming into these ports, convoys arrived in waves, and they needed to be unloaded before the next one arrived. Air raid damage to the ports and ships could slow or halt this process, having a domino effect down the line. The average round-trip voyage for ships to Europe was 72 days, exclusive of any local operations in theatre. Those sailing to the Southwest Pacific or India required 123 days. This means that one typical freighter could complete five trips annually for General Eisenhower, while a similar ship could only manage three for General MacArthur or Admiral Louis Mountbatten. The large majority of this time was spent not at sea, but in port waiting to be discharged or loaded.'

Even with these obstacles, the War Shipping Administration produced some impressive results. Over the course of the war, it delivered 203,500,000 long tons of cargo and 64,700,000 long tons of petroleum overseas, along with over seven million troops. At the same time it imported 70,500,000 long tons of freight and 35,000,000 long tons of oil. By August 1945, the WSA reached an average delivery rate of 7,600 long tons an hour." However, the competition between the military, Lend-Lease, civilian programs, and support for the Allies and neutral nations, always proved highly controversial.44

The last major conflict involving shipping to erupt during the war concerned the control and number of ships dispatched to theatre and service commands. The military viewed the ships as its own assets when they arrived in theatre and retained many of them for inordinate amounts of time. The WSA, on the other hand, attempted to keep ships in nearly perpetual motion to improve the logistical flow to the commands and also to utilize returning ships for the delivery of raw materials when practical.[45] Recently, Clay Blair has noted that the German U-boat offensive failed, in any appreciable measure, to interdict the flow of

'Robert W. Coakley and Richard M. Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1943-1945* (Washington, 1968), 179-185, and Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportation,* 71-72.

[41] War Shipping Administration, *Merchdnt Marine at War,* 12-32.

[42] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportdtion,* 81. Other area roundtrips are Mediterranean, 79 days; Central Pacific, 62; and South Pacific, 83.

[u] War Shipping Administration, *Merchant Marine at War,* 9-32.

[44] For an excellent example of this argument see Richard M. Leighton, "U.S. Merchant Shipping and the British Import Crisis," Kent Roberts Greenfield, ed, *Command Decisions* (Washington, 1960), 199-224. [as] Pedraj a, *A Historical Dictionary of the U.S. Merchant Marine and Shipping Industry,* 647-650; and Leighton and Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy,* 398-404, 455-470.

supplies from the United States across the Atlantic to Europe. [46] However, his argument overlooks all the limitations, previously stated, that the Allies faced in delivering the men, materiel, and supplies needed to defeat the Axis during the Second World War. German submarine operations were but one, and in some cases not the most serious, obstacle.

In their two-volume *Global Logistics and Strategy,* Robert Coakley and Richard Leighton, examined the American Army's view of supply in the war and convincingly concluded that merchant shipping, above all else, proved to be the greatest planning factor faced by the Allies in the war.' Throughout the war, many of the principal military campaigns revolved around or were dependent upon merchant shipping in one way or another.

Unlike the First World War where the focus was predominately on the western front, the Second World War saw fighting on nearly every continent, and the expansion of America's role as the Arsenal of Democracy for most of the United Nations would have been useless unless the materiel could be delivered. Admiral Land ofthe Maritime Commission and WSA found himself in the uncomfortable position of fielding competing demands from the Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest J. King, Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, theatre commanders, industry leaders at home, and representatives of allied nations. On top of these demands, the merchant marine also had to contend with enemy action.

Much has been written on the Battle of the Atlantic and there is still some doubt whether or not the German U-boat threat was a real and critical threat to the Allies. It is clear that, without containing this menace, the build-up of the American Army in England would have been impossible." Not until 1943, with the introduction of very long-range patrol aircraft, hunter-killer groups formed around escort carriers, new technological innovations, and the implementation of the emergency construction program, did the Allies perceive that they had overcome the initial shipping crisis. By the time of the invasion of Normandy, only twenty U.S. Army divisions were in place in England. It was intended that after landing these units, others would sail directly from the states to continental Europe, making the suppression of the U-boat menace in 1943 a prerequisite for Operation Overlord. Fearing a resurgence, General Eisenhower ordered Major General Troy Middleton's VIII Corps, of Lieutenant General George Patton's Third Army, once he broke out of the beachhead, to swing westward

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46 Clay Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunters, 1939-1942* (New York, 1996), 418-427, 691-700; and *Hitler's U-Boat War: The Hunted, 1942-1945* (New York, 1998), 706-711. "What emerges from this analysis is that, contrary to the general perception at the close of 1941, German U-boats were nowhere close to isolating and strangling Great Britain . . . the U-boat campaign in American waters was of small consequence . . . the principal achievement of the U-boat campaign in American waters was to force the Allies to commit vast resources to extending the convoy network . . . [and] during the period under examination, from September 1942 to May 1945, according to American and British sources, the Allies sailed 953 convoys east and west on the North and Middle Atlantic runs. These convoys were composed of 43,256 merchant ships. Of these 272 were sunk by U-boats. Ninety-nine point four (99.4) percent of all Allied merchant ships sailing in North Atlantic convoys in this period reached their destinations intact."

47 Coakley and Leighton, *Globdl Logistics dnd Strdtegy, 1943-1945,* 819.

48 Ibid.. 351-368.

into the Brittany peninsula, not to capture the ports for primarily logistical reasons as alleged by some historians, but to clear the U-boat pens or seize key geographic areas that would negate them. Allied leaders were unsure if merely severing their overland communication would be sufficient to halt their usefulness as bases as the Germans, in case they had stockpiled supplies or intended to use the ports as staging areas for 'Milch Cow' cargo submarines .[49]

However, the need for ships by the military proved insatiable. In the invasions of Guadalcanal and North Africa in 1942, all of the transports and cargo ships used by the Americans were ex-merchant ships requisitioned by the Navy.' In later campaigns, converted merchant ships were reinforced with Maritime Commission vessels either converted or purposely built as attack transports or cargo ships, not to mention tankers and support vessels providing logistical support to the fleet. Yet, ships were only one cog in the network of logistical support. The development of ports of debarkation, storehouses, and inland transportation networks were, and still are, essential to ensure the continued motion of ocean cargo. In late 1942, during the Guadalcanal offensive, the port of Noumea served as the forward base to support Operation Watchtower. The South Pacific island lacked the necessary infrastructure and host nation support – it was a French colony and the Allies endured bad relations due to the position of the Vichy government – to sustain a large military presence. As overall commander, Vice Admiral Robert Ghormley (later replaced by Vice Admiral William Halsey) clamoured for supplies and the WSA attempted to meet his demands by dispatching ships to Noumea. On 23 September 1942, eighty-six merchant vessels sat at anchor, effectively taken out of the war due to logistical constraints.' The port lacked suitable pier space, warehouses, and stevedores to handle the influx of ships needed to support a major offensive. As a result, only high-priority cargo was offloaded. The ships served as floating warehouses instead of cargo transporters; a poor use for scarce hulls when commanders everywhere were crying out for ships and supplies; a practice that proved more common than not. Halsey eventually alleviated this situation by assigning a general officer to oversee the port, but as the war progressed, new ports and bases had to be developed in a similar manner, particularly with the dual advance of the Southwest Pacific offensive under General Douglas MacArthur and the Central Pacific campaign under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. In Europe, while ports and infrastructure did exist, the capacity necessary to handle the burden of several million troops, in addition to the civilian populations and their associated

Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, *A War To Be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2000), 430; Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy* (New York, 1994 ed.), 434n; and Kevin Smith, " Constraining Overlord: Civilian Logistics, Torch, and the Second Front," Theodore A. Wilson, *D-Day 1944* (Lawrence, 1994 ed.), 42-62.

so Samuel Eliot Morison, *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions* (Boston, 1949), 272-273; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Operations in North African Waters* (Boston, 1947), 36-40; and James C. Fahey, *The Ships and Aircraft of the US. Fleet,* War Edition (Annapolis, 1988 ed.), 52.

'Ibid., 398-404.

logistical tail, required similar solutions.

The competition for shipping resources led, in May 1943, to the establishment of the Joint Military Traffic Committee (JMTC) under the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was initially an attempt to usurp control of civilian shipping from the WSA, but eventually became a venue of cooperation and mutual discussion of logistical matters.' At the same time, the services attempted to utilize their own shipping agencies to meet their limited needs. To handle the shipment of bulk petroleum products, Admiral King established the Navy Allocated Tanker Service under the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations for Material to supplement the service forces with leased WSA tankers.' The Naval Transportation Service, however, played only a very minor role throughout the war; far more significant was the rise of the Army Transport Service. On 31 July 1942, the Army officially established the Transportation Corps and transferred the water division of the Quartermaster Corps to this organization. The ATS created a clear working agreement to provide shipping and to ensure that the loading and offloading of these ships was coherently organized. The Army expanded its control of ports in the United States and overseas to provide a smooth transition for cargo, something that the NTS failed to accomplish until very late in the war. The growth of the ATS fleet that outstripped that of the U.S. Navy: 111,006 to 74,708, was remarkable, but most of these were small landing and harbor craft.54 The figures for ships over 1,000 gross tons are more revealing. Of these, the ATS controlled 261 troop transports or hospital ships and 1,445 freighters for a total deadweight tonnage of sixteen million, exceeding the entire pre-war capacity of the United States Merchant Marine.'

The acceleration of offensives in both Europe and the Pacific in 1944 produced the greatest consternation over merchant shipping during the entire Second World War. All too often, the wars in the Pacific, in Northwestern Europe, in Asia, and on the Eastern Front are treated separately with little interaction between them. While commanders like MacArthur, Eisenhower, Nimitz, Mountbatten, or Georgi Zhukov could focus on their own immediate concerns, the WSA and the British Ministry of War Transport had to look at the bigger picture. It must be remembered that, in the summer of 1944, the Allies initiated the greatest synchronized assault against a combined enemy the world had ever seen. When the invasion of Normandy was launched in June 1944 across the English Channel, Admiral Nimitz was mounting a similar attack across the Pacific on the Marianas Islands, while General MacArthur was leapfrogging along the New Guinea coast – supported by a makeshift fleet

[52] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportation,* 70.

[53] Duncan S. Ballentine, *U.S. Ndvdl Logistics in the Second World War* (Princeton, 1947) and Worral Reed Carter, *Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil: The Story of Fleet Logistics Afloat in the Pacific During World War II* (Washington, 1953). These volumes are the leading secondary treatments of naval logistics in the Second World War. Both, however, focus chiefly on the immediate supply of fleet vessels and give only cursory mention to the merchant ships that supplied the forward deployed auxiliaries and their advanced bases, let alone those that served in direct fleet support.

[54] David H. Grover, *U.S. Army Ships dnd Watercraft of World Wdr II* (Annapolis, 1987), xi-x.

55 Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Military Sea Transportation,* 82-83.

of Australian, Dutch, Chinese, American, and even Thai merchant ships, impressed into service.[56] The Soviets were preparing to initiate Operation ***Bagration*** that destroyed German Army Group Centre, while General Harold Alexander's Fifteenth Army Group was liberating Rome and driving up the Italian peninsula, and withdrawing forces for Operation ***Anvil*** – the amphibious assault on southern France. In China, B-29 Superfortresses began the bombing of the Japanese home islands. In retaliation, the Japanese launched their ***Ichi-Go*** offensive, aimed at capturing these airfields, while besieging the British-Indian 14th Army at Imphal. All of these attacks and defenses required massive logistical support, and in particular, merchant shipping to transport the requisite fuel, men, supplies, and materiel to sustain them. The apparent victory over the U-boats in the Atlantic, the vanquishing of the Japanese fleet, and the shipbuilding program all made it appear that the shipping stranglehold had been eliminated, when in essence it had been magnified. In a letter to Secretary of State Cordell Hull on 4 February 1944, Admiral Land lamented, "May I say candidly that the shipping situation, insofar as we can see it, for the next five or six months is as tight as it has been at any time since the war started. The reason is that as each theatre of war has become active, huge tonnages have been necessarily retained for operational purposes.'"

Many historians have viewed the Allied merchant shipping situation in terms akin to Russell Weigley's thesis of the American military steamroller style of warfare – in this case, producing more ships than the enemy could sink – whereas the truth is that the Allies suffered from an acute shortage of the right types of vessels.' This misunderstanding stems principally from the fondness of many maritime historians for the ***Liberty*** ships. Admiral Land detested these vessels and viewed them merely as a stopgap measure. Notwithstanding this criticism, the ships did have some favourable attributes: simplicity of construction, standardized plans, rapidity of construction, simplicity of operation, and their large cargo carrying capacity.' He did not want the Maritime Commission to become involved with them in any large measure, but a deficit in the production of steam turbines, along with America's failure to produce a successful large, commercial diesel engine, and the urgent need for freighters led to ***Liberties*** becoming the workhorse for the Allied merchant marines. Land preferred the larger, faster, and more efficient C-class standard freighters, but with the Navy acquiring these vessels as fast as they were produced, he belatedly endorsed the conversion

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Reports of General MacArthur, *MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase* (Washington, 1950), 154-155.

Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1943-1945,* 353.

Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, 1973), 313: "To destroy the enemy army, the only proven way remained the application of mass and concentration in the manner of U.S. Grant." Blair, *Hitler's U-Boat Wdr: The Hunted, 1939-1942,* 451: "A mindless theory had taken deep root in Washington — fostered by Jerry Land at the U.S. Maritime Commission and others — that one way to defeat the U-boat was simply to produce merchant ships at a much faster rate that U-boats could sink them."

" Emory S. Land, "The 'Wheel-Horse' of World War II," United States Naval Institute *Proceedings* (August 1958), 119-122.

[64] Robert W. Browning, Jr., *U.S. Merchant Vessel War Cdsualties of World War II* (Annapolis, 1996), 470, 476.
[65] Ibid., 469, 499-501, 506-508.

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of the emergency shipyards building *Liberty* ships, to an improved emergency design, the *Victory* ship. In 1944, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral William D. Leahy, concurred, but a critical shortage of steel – the prime limiting factor faced by the Allies in ship construction – and Allied offensives in all theatres compelled the continuation of Liberty ship construction to the detriment of the *Victory* and C-type freighter programs.'

Even following the successes that summer and the continued construction of *Liberty* ships, by the fall of 1944 a new crisis threatened the Allies. When Nimitz and MacArthur combined their forces to liberate the Philippines, it further stretched a tenuous supply line. In northwest Europe, Eisenhower's command was forced to halt its advance due to the lack of supplies and the inability of General Bernard Montgomery to clear the approaches to the Belgium port of Antwerp. Additionally, the rapid liberation of France and the Low Countries required a diversion of tonnage to food and relief supplies for the civilian populations, along with ships to support the Soviet build-up along the Manchurian border against the Japanese. Shipping shortages in the Pacific proved so acute that Nimitz impressed merchant vessels – with their civilian crews, similar to the Royal Navy's Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) and the U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command – as naval auxiliaries to meet his mounting logistical burdens.61

As the U.S. Navy increased in size and striking power, the amount of ammunition it expended likewise increased dramatically. Over the course of the war, the US Navy possessed only 19 ammunition ships to supply their entire fleet. In desperation, more than a dozen *Victory-class* freighters were chartered from the War Shipping Administration and designated auxiliary ammunition supply ships (AKE), retaining their civilian crews. This action was in direct violation of a Navy declaration that pledged to keep merchant ships out of advanced areas, since they could not be adequately protected.[62] Consequently, merchant mariners found themselves delivering their dangerous cargo, not to rear-echelon supply points, but directly to combat zones off Leyte, Luzon, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.63

Lane, *Ships for Victory,* 574-577, 601-607, and "Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1943-1945,* 246-270. Leahy wrote to Douglas Wilson of the WSA on this subject: "The JCS believe . . . that shipping . . . will not continue to be the bottleneck of our war effort overseas, that limitations in production of war products other than merchant shipping will govern. The urgent necessity to produce the greatest possible number of ships in a given time, met by mass production of Liberty ships, therefore becomes less compelling . . . This experience leads to the conviction that our strategic needs in 1944 will best be met by the maximum number of fast ships." (250)

[61] Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations: New Guinea and the Marianas* (Boston, 1953), 341-350; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations: Leyte* (Boston, 1958), 74-85; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations: Victory in the Pacific* (Boston, 1960), 156-169.

[62] Felix Riesenberg Jr., *Sea War: The Story of the U.S. Merchant Marine in World War II* (New York, 1956), 282.

[63] Paul H. Silverstone, *U.S. Warships of World War II* (Garden City, 1966), 328; James Fahey, *The Ships and Aircraft of the US. Fleet,* Victory Edition (Annapolis, 1988 ed.), 60; Samuel Morison *General Index and Supplement* (Boston, 1960), 75.

The policy to place merchant ships in the front areas also exposed the crews to new and untold danger. On the day after Christmas 1944, a Japanese task force of one heavy cruiser, one light cruiser, and six destroyers attacked the American beachhead at Mindoro, in the Philippines. The Liberty ship, SS *James H. Breasted,* found herself under attack from ships, and later by Japanese aircraft. Flames ignited by the gunfire and bombing swept through the vessel and led to the captain abandoning ship; the vessel was declared a constructive total loss, but fortunately suffered no casualties. During the invasion of Mindoro, the merchant marine lost more men than the combat forces seizing the island. In large part, this was due to the cataclysmic explosions of the SS *John Burke* and *Lewis L. Dyche,* both heavily laden with ammunition and resulting in the loss of their entire crews.64 At Okinawa, in April 1945, three merchant ships similarly loaded – SS *Logan Victory,* SS *Hobbs Victory,* and SS *Canada Victory* – were all sunk due to enemy actions, highlighting the fact that the danger to the merchant marine had not subsided but merely changed form."

The planned invasion of the Japanese home islands, Operation *Downfall,* would have required an even more massive commitment; involving shipments not only from the west coast of the United States and Pacific staging bases, but also from Europe and the east coast, further exacerbating the need for shipping. Additionally, the need for more transports led to the conversion of 97 *Victories* and 300 *Liberties* into makeshift transports, making them unavailable for Lend-Lease shipments to the Soviet Union and contributing to some of the initial hostility between the two emerging superpowers. The surrender of Japan following the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki eliminated invasion plans, but many of these ships were used for the repatriation home of Allied soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines home in Operation *Magic Carpet.* As the ships returned to Europe and Asia, they loaded supplies for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. To help restore the war-torn merchant fleets, the United States Congress passed the Ship's Sale Act of 1946 and sold off a large portion of the Maritime Commission fleet to its Allies. A total of 1,113 ships were purchased from the U.S., marking a decline in the American merchant marine but reinvigorating the Allied fleets. To prevent the disorganization that plagued the Allied sea effort, the newly formed Department of Defense created the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) in 1949, combining the ships of the Army Transport Service with those of the Navy Transportation Service, along with some of the functions of the War Shipping Administration. The following year, when the Democratic People's Republic of Korea invaded its neighbor to the south, MSTS was able to respond quickly and effectively to the sealift crisis and ship United Nations forces to prevent the fall of the Republic of South Korea.

The overall success of the United Nations in the Second World War required a 'bridge of ships' to be erected across all the world's oceans. This came at a great cost; over 4,700 Allied merchant ships were lost, a stark reminder of the horrors of the conflict. However, merchant ships are merely tools. It was the merchant mariners, the only civilians who willing

[64] Robert W. Browning, Jr., *U.S. Merchant Vessel War Cdsualties of World War II* (Annapolis, 1996), 470, 476.
[65] Ibid., 469, 499-501, 506-508.

put themselves in harm's way during the war, who paid the ultimate price. All too often, the only references to the merchant marine's role are as particular targets in the Battle of Atlantic, or the horror of Convoy PQ-17 and the Murmansk Run, or the Pedestal convoys to Malta, or the problems experienced between Navy sailors and merchant mariners. Yet this limited view belittles the true role that the Allied merchant mariners played in the Second World War. Nearly 50,000 mariners perished at sea during the war, and their service to their country and the United Nations is no different than any soldier, airmen, marine, or sailor that donned the uniform of their country against Axis aggression.

Table 3 66
Number of Merchant Mariners killed during World War II

Britain	22,490
India	6,093
China	2,023
United States	5,638
Norway	4,795
Greece	2,000
Netherlands	1,914
Denmark	1,886
Canada	1,437
Belgium	893
South Africa	182
Australia	109
New Zealand	72

While no one element can be singled out as a decisive factor in the Allies' victory, merchant shipping must rank as one of the most influential. The War Shipping Administration, in their final report to President Harry S. Truman on the role of the merchant marine aptly summarizes the effort of the entire Allied merchant navies.

> The United States was a member of a fighting team of United Nations that won the greatest war in history. There were three major players who represented the United States on that team: Our fighting forces overseas, the production army here at home, and the link between them – the United States Merchant Marine.

66 source for these figures comes from Philip Kaplan and Jack Currie, *Convoy: Merchant Sailors at War, 1939-1945* (Annapolis, 1998), 23. The exception is the figures for the United States, which comes from War Shipping Administration, *The United States Merchant Marine at War, 7* .

Each of the three was dependent upon the other; and together with their counterparts in other United Nations, a winning combination was evolved which smashed the Axis powers beyond all recovery.

Never before has the maritime power of America been so effectively utilized. Its naval and merchant fleets became the difference between victory and defeat.

Just as our Merchant Marine linked American overseas forces with American production, so it aided in cementing the United Nations into one fighting unit not separated, but joined by the oceans. In this capacity, the United States Merchant Marine, possessing finally the largest number of merchant ships in the United Nations' pool of shipping, can probably be credited as the greatest single strategic factor in the defeat of the Axis powers.'

[67] War Shipping Administration, *The United Stdtes Merchdnt Marine at War,* 1.